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County Clerk  
Carmella  
Sabaugh and  
SMART bus driver  
Walt Jenkins  
are ready to offer  
free rides for  
jurors.

Macomb Daily  
staff photo by  
Craig Gaffield



# Jurors can get free ride to court

By Chad Selweski

Macomb Daily Staff Writer

You have one less excuse for avoiding jury duty.

If you can't find a way to the courthouse, the county will find one for you, even if it means having a bus pick you up at your home.

County officials have approved an experimental program to provide free bus service to those summoned for circuit court jury duty.

"Some people don't have a car. The other thing is, they have a hard time finding parking in downtown Mount Clemens," said county Clerk Carmella Sabaugh, who devised the plan.

It's believed Macomb will become the first county in Michigan to offer free transportation for jurors.

The SMART bus system will provide the rides, with some jurors living north of M-59 offered curb-to-curb service aboard a small bus. Some others will be picked up at home and transported to the nearest bus stop or transit hub, such as Lakeside mall in Sterling Heights, where they would transfer to a large bus.

William Froberg, the county jury commissioner, said lack of transportation is the top reason given by those who ask to be excused from jury duty. Kenneth

Blackwell of Warren, who served on a jury in October, said he wishes the program existed when he was summoned.

"I did not have transportation at the time I served on jury duty and had this program been available, I definitely would have used it," he said.

Still, officials estimate that only five to 10 jurors per week, perhaps 20, will take advantage of the free buses. About 150 people report for jury duty at the county courthouse in Mount Clemens every Tuesday.

SMART, the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation, will provide 500 free bus tickets to get the program started. Each jury summons mailed to residents will include information about the free bus service.

Dan Dirks, SMART general manager, said some north Macomb jurors would face a two-bus trip lasting more than an hour. But others living within walking distance of a major bus line would have a quick, convenient ride to the courthouse. He hopes the program catches on and eventually spreads to Wayne and Oakland counties.

"When we create partnerships, sometimes they work and sometimes they don't. We want to make this work," he said.

The program is tentatively slated to start in the spring but how to fund it beyond the first 500 tickets donated by SMART is still under discussion. Each round trip costs about \$4.

Jurors who use the service will be required to forfeit their mileage reimbursement check of 10 cents per mile. That will pay for about half the program's price tag.

But a plan to create a voluntary contribution fund to pay the other half fell flat. Chief Circuit Judge Peter Maceroni and several members of the Board of Commissioners dismissed a clerk's office proposal to encourage all jurors to donate their first \$25 of jury duty pay into a bus riders' fund.

Jurors are paid \$25 for the first day of service and \$40 for each subsequent day.

"It's kind of a lot to think this program will be funded by people donating one day's worth of jury pay," said Commissioner Susan Doherty, a Warren Democrat.

On Wednesday, the county board's Legislative and Administrative Services Committee approved the program start-up but delayed the funding question until their April meeting. Committee Chairman Ed Szczepanski, a Shelby Township Republican, has insisted that the program not spend any tax dollars.